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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN
LUKIN

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 7, Ambassador Burns met with Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin to discuss a range of human rights issues, including the continued detention of former Yukos VP Vasiliy Aleksanyan, new reports of the use of psychological hospitalization of outspoken political activists, and the upcoming Carnegie-Lukin Human Rights roundtable. Lukin expressed a willingness to intervene and assist in these cases, but acknowledged that his ability to make major changes was limited. End summary.

Yukos Lawyer Vasiliy Aleksanyan

¶2. (C) During a one-hour meeting on February 7, the Ambassador raised his strong concern over the treatment of former Yukos VP Vasiliy Aleksanyan, still in pre-trial detention. Lukin acknowledged Aleksanyan's serious medical condition (AIDS, lymphatic cancer, and tuberculosis). Earlier this week, Lukin said he wrote the Ministry of Justice to request that Aleksanyan be provided with appropriate medical treatment in a hospital, but had not received a response. Lukin said that there was not much that he could do since "this is a matter for the courts." (Note: Later on February 7, the Federal Prison Service announced that Aleksanyan was being moved to a Moscow hospital for treatment, but that he would not be released from custody and will be kept under guard in the hospital. The Moscow Simonovsky court earlier suspended the pending trial for Aleksanyan after an independent medical examination confirmed that he had cancer and was too ill to stand trial. End note.)

¶3. (C) Lukin's staff later told us that the European Court of Human Rights had appealed four times for Aleksanyan to be hospitalized, but that these appeals went from the Russian Mission in Strasbourg to the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Justice, not to Lukin's office.

Abuse of Psychiatric Hospitalization

¶4. (C) The Ambassador underscored serious concern over reports of political activists being involuntarily institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals. Lukin acknowledged that this was a growing problem, and that his office had already intervened in two cases, involving Larissa Arap in Murmansk in August, and Artem Basyrov in Mari El in December. He said that he was not familiar with the most recent report of Other Russia activist Roman Nikolaychik in Tver, who was hospitalized on February 2, but said that he would look into the case.

¶5. (C) Lukin said that he was preparing to create a new

deputy ombudsman position dedicated to examining the "pattern of abuses" of psychiatric treatment in Russia. His investigations into the recent cases of Arap and Basyrov, along with other complaints sent to his office, have raised disturbing questions about how psychological care is administered by state-run hospitals. Lukin said that these problems are widespread and not just connected with political or personal vendettas, reflecting the poor state of psychiatric care in Russia.

Prisons

¶6. (C) Lukin said that prison conditions were one of the most important issues that his office addressed. He admitted that his staff faced difficulty in gaining access to prisons and to obtaining an un-sanitized look at conditions. While scheduled visits revealed few problems, Lukin said that unannounced "snap visits" revealed dangerous and squalid conditions, especially in the overcrowded pre-trial detention facilities. He said that the Federal Prison Service was slowly improving conditions, and that newly constructed facilities were much better than the existing ones.

Scientologists

¶7. (U) The Ambassador mentioned a request from the Church of Scientology, which had not received a reply to an August 2007 request to meet with Lukin's staff to discuss problems the Church was facing in Russia. Lukin said that he would look into the matter.

Carnegie-Lukin Human Rights Roundtable

¶8. (U) Lukin confirmed that arrangements in place for the February 13-14 Carnegie-Ombudsman Human Rights Roundtable in Moscow will address issues related to detainees. Lukin provided the Ambassador with a list of the Russian participants:

- Vladimir LUKIN, Human Rights Ombudsman of the Russian Federation
 - Aleksandr PANOV, Rector, Diplomatic Academy
 - Mikhail ZADORNOV, President, VTB-24
 - Sergey ROGOV, Director, U.S. and Canada Institute
 - Vladimir PECHATNOV, MGIMO (Moscow State Institute for International Relations)
 - Vladimir POZNER, Rector, Pozner School of Television Journalism
 - Valentin GEFTER, Human Rights Institute
 - Lev LEVINSON, Human Rights Institute
 - General Leonid IVASHOV, Vice President, Academy of Geopolitical Problems
 - Anatoliy BONDAR, Deputy Minister of Justice
 - Nataliya MIRZA, Head of the Secretariat, Human Rights Ombudsman
 - Giorgiy KUNADZE, Deputy to Human Rights Ombudsman
- BURNS